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ABSTRACT

The brochure is intended to help parents understand and aid their gifted children in home, school, and community. Gifted children are defined in terms of outstanding intellectual or creative ability and rank among the top 30% of the nation's school population. Studies are said to reveal that gifted children do not follow a uniform pattern in delineation of individual nature, interests, and needs, yet tend to be superior in almost all measurable human traits. Needs of the gifted child are presented in terms of developmental tasks and profiles for the age levels of infancy and early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence. The role of parents in motivating their gifted child is discussed, and 10 ways parents can be helpful to schools (such as helping to secure resource materials and persons for research purposes) are listed. Suggestions made for schools to provide adequate programs include offering differentiated, individualized programs in broad rather than specific vocational areas. Questionnaires containing from 19 to 25 questions focus on whether a child is gifted, whether a parent is gifted, and whether a school provides for the gifted child. (MC)

A Guide for Parents . . .

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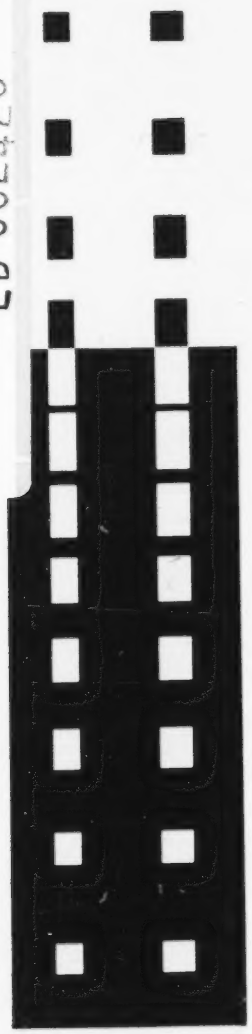

MENTALLY GIFTED CHILDREN and YOUTH

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION 1973

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A Guide for Parents . . .

MENTALLY GIFTED CHILDREN and YOUTH

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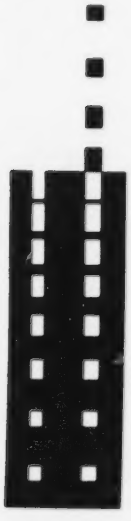

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This brochure was prepared for the Bureau of Special Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education, by the Special Education Department of the Bucks County Public Schools, Intermediate Unit No. 22.

FOREWORD

Mentally gifted children need help and encouragement in developing their talents, for superior achievement in intellectual activities or any area requiring special talent does not "just happen". Growth toward an effective life pattern must be nurtured and supported, particularly where a child has unusual capacities in areas of intellectual, artistic, social and creative endeavors.

In our democracy, we have an obligation to assure that every child has the opportunity to develop to the utmost of his abilities and to encourage him to do so. Special Education in the schools of Pennsylvania is one way our society provides for individuals who are different from the average to the extent that they have special needs in their pursuit of self-fulfillment. Programs of Special Education enable these children to achieve their birthright of maximum potential growth through school and community programs designed to meet their individual needs. The mentally gifted have such special needs, and the purpose of this booklet is to help parents understand the nature of their gifted children and to show how parents can help their children in home, school and community.

Chapter I

WHO ARE THE MENTALLY GIFTED?

The Pennsylvania Department of Education defines Mentally Gifted Pupils as those who have outstanding intellectual and/or creative ability and who are ranked among the top 3 percent of the nation's school-age population. Standards for admission to state-approved programs for the gifted include the requirement that a child must have a high intelligence quotient as determined by an individual psychological test.

Intensive studies of the characteristics of such children have been made for the past sixty years and we know a great many things about them - their traits, variability, needs, problems and potential for achievement. Two generalizations are readily seen:

1. Mentally gifted children do not follow a uniform pattern in any delineation of their individual nature, interests and needs.
2. The typical gifted child is likely to be superior in almost all measurable human traits. (There are exceptions, of course, but we are describing here a statistical majority of those classified as gifted.)

The first trait to be noted is that the gifted child usually develops interests, abilities and skills of many kinds at an earlier age than they normally appear. For example, he learns to talk at an earlier age than the typical child and often shows an unusual and precocious ability in using words and sentences. This precocity continues and his interests are most likely to be advanced for his age at every stage of his development to maturity.

Some of the other traits which are characteristic of the gifted

are:

- High interest in verbal materials, such as books and magazines.
- Rapid learning of facts, concepts and skills.
- Capacity for abstract thinking, with ability to analyze and evaluate.
- Sustained power of attention to a task.
- Resourcefulness, with the ability to see many possible solutions to a problem.
- Sensitivity and responsiveness to others and to the world around him.
- Creativity, both in problem solving and in the arts.
- Curiosity about everything he encounters.

(See checklist Is your child gifted? on page 16.

Chapter II

WHAT ARE THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF THE GIFTED?

If the mentally gifted child is to be challenged and stimulated by his home, school and community environment, it is imperative that he have opportunities for exploration and experience not usually provided for those of average ability. Lack of such opportunities sometimes leads to frustration, boredom and the development of self-destructive or anti-social attitudes and behavior.

A helpful analysis of growth and development is one made by Havighurst, who has described the needs of our children and youth in terms of developmental tasks:

> "A developmental task is a task which arises at or about a certain period in the life of the individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society, and difficulty with later tasks." [1]

The charts on the next few pages show tasks faced by all children and the special needs of the gifted as they grow and mature.

A wide diversity of interests is characteristic of the gifted and they should be encouraged to develop enthusiastic and meaningful participation in a number of areas of human activities and concerns.

A typical gifted child has the capability to be involved in scientific research, instrumental music study, computer program-

1. Havighurst, Robert, Developmental Tasks and Education, David, McKay Company, Inc., 1952, p. 2.

DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

INFANCY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

1. Learning to walk and talk.
2. Learning body controls and physiological differences.
3. Learning to relate oneself emotionally to others.
4. Forming simple concepts of social and physical reality.
5. Learning to distinguish between right and wrong, thus developing a conscience.

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

1. Learning physical skills necessary for ordinary games.
2. Building a wholesome sense of self.
3. Learning to get along with peers.
4. Learning to read, write, and calculate.
5. Developing a simple value system with concepts necessary for everyday living.
6. Achieving personal independence.
7. Developing attitudes about social groups and institutions.

ADOLESCENCE

1. Assuming a more mature relationship with peers of both sexes, realizing acceptance within the peer society.
2. Acceptance of oneself physiologically.
3. Attaining emotional independence of adults.
4. Finding a route toward economic independence, via preparation for a selected occupation.
5. Developing civic competence and a sense of social responsibility.
6. Acquiring a set of values for guidance of behavior.
7. Preparing for marriage and family life.

SPECIAL NEEDS OF THE GIFTED

INFANCY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

The gifted child performs the same tasks but usually at a much earlier age. He is interested in asserting his physical and mental independence sooner than normally expected. Thinking patterns develop through curiosity, questioning, physical explorations, and problem challenges. Internalization of value systems and a sense of self and of conscience occur much earlier. He becomes interested in being an "organizer" and displays early attempts at creativity. He identifies and explores the world outside the home sooner and with less reluctance than the normal child.

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

At this stage the gifted child develops physical dexterity, particularly in the manipulative skills, almost to the fullest degree. The "apron strings are cut", for now the emphasis shifts from home-directed to self-directed. There is much experimentation with fantasy, unreality, super-heroes, and media stimulation. He is becoming more sophisticated in his questioning and seeks to classify the physical world. He is developing his leadership abilities as he is rapidly approaching adolescence.

He needs to identify with others like himself. His social development demands that he have friends of the same age who are also bright.

He will develop particular hobbies or talents, in some of which he will excel. He will be extremely precocious in emulation of adolescents in fads and fashions. He will sometimes feel a sense of isolation socially as he recognizes his inherent "difference". Frustration often results from the unrealistic goals which he establishes for himself.

ADOLESCENCE

The gifted child has reached adolescence long before he will be accepted by "teen-agers". He will probably experience a sense of isolation and will need to belong to various youth organizations in order to reduce his loneliness. He will probably develop a pseudo-sophistication and much superficiality in his attitudes. He needs parental support now more than ever. Usually, he will be quite articulate and will relate easily to adults. He will develop a self-concept consonant with his potential. He may have a greater problem developing appropriate sex roles and relationships. He may abandon intellectual activities which are not accepted by the group in favor of more ordinary pursuits. As an alternative, he may persist in being different and sever the lines of social communication. Usually he will need help in learning to adjust to adolescent society without sacrificing his exceptional abilities.

ming, oil painting, debating, basketball, and writing satire. (Often all these are happening at the same time!)

Each such experience contributes a new facet to the ongoing and emerging life pattern of the gifted child. Gifted adults often have several strong vocational and avocational interests, and we can help children to prepare for this by providing stimulating and challenging opportunities for exploring many kinds of human experiences.

A positive image of self is vital to the successful maturation of children and there are some special considerations to be faced when we consider how to help gifted children to acquire a good self-image.

The able youngster finds himself comfortable and successful in dealing with the adult world of ideas. He feels secure with older people and may avoid his age-peers. While he needs the stimulation and encouragement of his association with adults, he must also develop the social living skills that can be learned only in experience with his age-mates. He, in fact, belongs in two worlds and parents and teachers must help him to function successfully in both.

The gifted have a high level of awareness of their role in society and they seek to establish values and ethical standards. They usually have a sincere concern for social issues and we must remember that the future direction of society will be determined by the concepts and value systems of our gifted leaders. It is the obligation of parents and schools to create a climate where social problems can be examined in an open-minded democratic environment. We must succeed in two vital purposes: teaching them how to think logically and instilling compassion in them.

A leading psychologist, Abraham Maslow, has described for us the kind of individuals our free society depends upon for continuity of values and implementation of constructive change. These are self-actualizing individuals, more mature and more fully human, who do not rest when basic needs are gratified but are motivated in higher ways, which Maslow calls "metamotivations". Such people

devote their energies and talents to tasks "outside themselves", sometimes as outgrowths of vocational pursuits but quite often as disparate avocational activities. This describes the kind of life the gifted seek for true fulfillment.

Self-actualizing people are dedicated people, devoted to some task, some vocation, duty or beloved job. Devotion and dedication is so marked that one can describe as passionate, selfless, and profound their feelings for their work.

Having passed through the hierarchy of basic needs, the self-actualizing person will experience mystical feelings. These feelings are not necessarily of a religious nature. The self-actualizing person is capable of the highest level of human experience - aesthetic moments, bursts of creativity, insight and discovery, fusion with nature and with art.

Maslow likens the exuberant feeling of a peak experience to the reaching of the mountain summit. Much striving through the hierarchy of biological and psychological fulfillments are necessary before the mountain peak is attained. Having attained the peaks, Maslow cautions, one must also be prepared for the plateaus, and sometimes, the valleys. Yet the self-actualizing person will not experience too many valleys because he will not allow himself to plummet.

The self-actualized person is what the gifted child is becoming. Dare we deprive him of his right to this development?

Chapter III

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PARENTS?

The process of learning does not occur solely in the classroom. Parents are a primary force in their children's education. While teachers provide direction, ideas, and materials for the sequential development of skills and understandings, the family motivates the child, as he progresses. Parent participation in the child's ongoing education is vital in the areas of motivation, reinforcement and enrichment.

Family expectancy is a major factor in children's motivation, and studies show it to be the single most influential determinant of high or low achievement both in and out of school. We often lose sight, too, of the importance of example. There are many instances where parents and other adults have set examples of interest and attainment in education and individual cultural pursuits which children have unconsciously (and successfully) imitated. Regardless of the adaptations made by the school, the gifted child will fall far short of attaining his potential if he fails the training at home that gives respect for intellectual pursuits, that builds in the value of perserverance and that encourages freedom of action and independence.

The home should provide an atmosphere that will nourish a maximum development of capabilities with understanding that will produce a minimum of maladjustment. Encouragement should not become pressure, excellence should not become the only goal of existence.

From earliest childhood, the home should provide a warm and accepting relationship with others. The child should be relaxed with adults and with the other members of the family group. He should

feel free to express himself but also become aware of the necessity of a structure without which this freedom would not be possible. When he makes a worthwhile contribution or inquiry it should be recognized as such, so that he is able to see himself as a necessary and welcome part of the family group.

The family should encourage social contact with other families, thus providing opportunities for interaction with other children. The gifted child should learn to relate successfully to children of all abilities, both his own age and older or younger, with experiences as varied as possible.

Stimulation for curiosity should be maintained. The child should be provided with new experiences in the arts and culture that keep his intellect challenged to reach out for more information and greater expression of himself. His awareness of his world, both natural and social, must continually be sharpened by meaningful contact with it. He should be part of family trips to museums, art galleries, concerts, recreation resorts, historical sites, and visits to relatives in other communities.

The gifted child needs early opportunities to develop responsibility for citizenship. He should be entrusted with the care of pets and his personal belongings. He should be given space of his own to pursue his interests and to perform experimentation, with the provisions that he show respect for the privilege by properly caring for the equipment. He should be given time to be alone; to wonder about his experiences, to dream about other times and places, and to build plans for his future. However, he must also provide the same opportunity for quiet reflection to the other members of his society.

The gifted child at an early age evinces a keen interest in solving his own problems and asserting his independence. He wants to dress and care for himself, and he enjoys the challenge of physical activities like climbing, bike-riding, sliding, "rough-housing", long before you deem it safe. He is curious about the "how to?" and "why do?" of mechanical operations. He is also an organizer and will try to

dominate other children's activities.

You as the parent can encourage his independence and his desire to learn by challenging him to think. Provide situations presenting a dilemma, various hypothetical actions that will force him to consider alternatives and thus initiate the formulation of his values. Subtle intervention via suggestions of ways to deal with his world will aid him in forming opinions and making judgments.

This kind of responsibility in decision-making should begin in early childhood and grow more complex with increasing maturity. Family situations offer an endless variety of opportunities for this important training. The child who sees himself as a decision-maker is also more likely to maintain good mental health, because this contributes to a self-image that is based on security and confidence.

Involving the gifted child in community events will help to challenge his energies, talents, and intelligence. Gifted children will look for challenges. The community in many cases stands ready to meet these challenges. Use them. Children will become involved in self-stimulating, self-motivating activities. The community will benefit from the energies and enthusiasms which the gifted child has given to the program.

Parental guidance may be helpful in allowing the child to make his own selection. Given the list of what is available in the community, allow him to evaluate and decide for himself that in which he wants to engage himself.

Jitney service may be the biggest service the parent can render.

Suggested community involvements include the following:

Nature groups, such as bird clubs, hiking clubs, bicycle hikes, biology clubs. Organize these groups if they are not already existent. After-school hours and Saturday are often good times for these activities.

Youth orchestras provide stimulation for the music enthusiast. Community orchestras are often looking for members to join their organization.

Libraries are in great need of volunteer help. Students can answer the telephone, check in and check out books, give information to other children who are seeking aid. A library is a pleasant and exciting place in which one can render his services.

Camera clubs provide stimulation for our children. From the clicking of the shutter for the first picture to the development of the roll of film there is excitement. When the first roll of film has been developed, new ideas are born concerning the establishment of a dark-room and we move from commercial development of film to our own dark-room

Drama groups are imaginative and exciting. Children begin with situational dramatics, creative dramatics, role-playing and produce these dramas in their own little theatre. The garage of the home often serves as a theatre. Children sell tickets for the performance, make their own scenery, devise their own props, and open the curtain to some of the best entertainment children or adults have seen.

Art clubs for sketching, drawing, printing and sculpturing are popular. Instructors are often graduates of fine art institutes. At the end of a series of classes, an exhibition is set up, so that each class participant is an exhibitor and some are prize-winners.

Many children find creative outlets in making movies. Movie making can be as simple or elaborate as one would like. An important aspect is the sequential development of the scenes. Script-writing, editing, animating, and titling offer exciting experiences which require self-discipline and persistence.

Scout troops exist in most communities. Some gifted children enjoy and meet the challenges of the scouting program. Winning badges becomes a challenge to these children. Other children prefer to meet their own challenges and do not respond to the earning of badges for the motivation necessary. Whichever method your gifted child responds to, allow him to select and enjoy his choice.

Museums, observatories and planetariums often welcome individual or small group activities in addition to their regular activities.

Parents can be helpful to schools in many ways. There are untapped resources that school personnel do not have time to explore. The following suggestions indicate activities in which parents can enrich the school's activities:

1. Become personally acquainted with his teachers, counselors, and principals. Make them aware of your desire to be of help to the school. The gifted child needs a unified environment. In order to dovetail his academic, social and home life, he will find his parent's help to be essential.
2. Offer your services for establishing a resource file of persons within the community with specific talents or experiences which would be extremely beneficial to the bright children. Enlist the help of these people.
3. Volunteer your time and efforts in arranging and conducting field trips in the community.
4. Help to secure resource materials and persons for research purposes.
5. Aid in developing collections and informational stockpiles within the school.
6. Share school interests with the child. Do not be simply a bystander, but participate in the activities as a member of the group.
7. Inform yourself about the provisions your school has made for the gifted. Are they adequate? If not, with concerted effort from other parents, express your interest in the establishment of a special kind of program. You will, of course, want to be well informed about the bright child before becoming involved with demands for his learning situation.
8. Secure the help of local organizations for providing scholarship aid for talented youngsters for after

school and summer activities. A theatre group, a science seminar operated by research scientists and technologists, and a myriad of other school extension programs, will need funds for operation.

9. Investigate the possibilities that may exist for observing pioneer programs in educating the gifted. Inform the school about this, and try to arrange a visitation for parents of other talented children.
10. Be willing to be an audience for the performance of the gifted youngster. Time consuming it is to accept that invitation to go to school, but well-worth it in fostering the special abilities of the child.

(See checklist Are You A Gifted Parent? on page 17.

Chapter IV

HOW CAN SCHOOLS PROVIDE ADEQUATE PROGRAMS?

In our American democracy, a fundamental purpose of education is to provide equal opportunity to every student to develop his talents and abilities to the maximum of his potential, so that he will have personal fulfillment and will be an effective citizen in our free society. One facet of this equality of opportunity is the provision of differentiated, individualized school programs that enable children with special needs to grow and develop with all possible encouragement and assistance. This is especially true for the mentally gifted, who often find their school programs to be unchallenging and ineffective.

American education today is concerning itself (and rightly so) with the need for career-oriented education, but a word of caution is in order when we consider the education of the gifted.

Often voiced is the insistence that our exceptionally bright children be trained and directed into the manpower stream of technological efficiency and production. This emphasis, often referred to as "guidance into early career lines", has resulted in a notable increase in training for a specific discipline rather than learning in the broad fields of human experience. Concrete evidence of this kind of educational bias exists in the unequal distribution of scholarship funds awarded in science, mathematics and engineering as compared to the liberal arts areas. Our best brains seem destined to be enveloped in a cocoon of occupational segregation, seduced there by societal pressures of achievement, mobility and money.

This "manpower" concept, imposed upon our most talented resource as an expediency to "success", negates their abilities to develop satisfying personal sets of values based upon their individual

productive and innovative capacities. We are holding in esteem the potential rewards of conformity and cheerful compliance with the status quo. We seem unwilling to acknowledge their need for developing or maintaining their own standards and beliefs. Our concept of the individual as manpower rather than man binds him into a lock-step "Organization Man", with the attendant hindrances to free expression of his many talents.

And multi-talents he often possesses! He usually has an embarrassing array of interests and abilities. These youngsters should not be pushed prematurely into a decision about a career, for in the long run, the early commitment may not be a suitable one. Most educators today feel that these students have no need for a definite commitment to a specific vocation before finishing high school. A more suitable goal would be the choice of a broad field rather than the specific.

Assuming that our goal is the education for maximum development of the individual, then we must elicit creative responses to the rich variety of academic experiences. Many of the interests of the gifted will eventually become life-time avocations. These, which will undoubtedly enhance leisure hours, are often in the realms of the fine and practical arts.

We must remember that the gifted are mentally "hungry" and require dietary stimulation. If this diet is restrictive, the result will be an individual lacking the means with which to enjoy his life on any but an occupational basis. What a disservice if we promulgate this kind of schooling!

(See questionnaire Does Your School Provide For The Gifted? on page 19.

IS YOUR CHILD GIFTED?

1. Is your child physically precocious? Did he begin to walk and talk early?
2. Did your child mature early with regard to sexual development?
3. Does he possess intellectual curiosity? Does he possess a large and picturesque vocabulary which is used with originality and rich imagery? Does he wonder, by asking, "I wonder how, why, when, where?"
4. Is your child highly competitive in group situations?
5. Does your child enjoy, and is he challenged by, independent study?
6. Does your child use problem-solving techniques in reaching conclusions?
7. Is he original and ingenious?
8. Is your child exceptionally good at physical activities like climbing, bike-riding, sliding, rough-housing, long before you deem it safe?
9. Does your child show advanced fine-motor control skills?
10. Did your child learn such skills as left-to-right progression, auditory discrimination, visual discrimination, likenesses and differences, word opposites?
11. Does he see many solutions to problems?
12. Does your child learn by himself, such that you comment, "He learned it by himself"?
13. Does your child use vocabulary beyond his age level?
14. Does your child memorize quickly?
15. Does your child perceive abstract ideas rapidly?
16. Does your child have a great curiosity about the nature of man, his environment, and his universe?
17. Does your child organize tasks and follow through those tasks to completion?
18. When drawing, does your child add much detail to his picture?
19. Does he enjoy reading the novel, the different, the bizarre?

ARE YOU A GIFTED PARENT?

1. Do you answer your child's questions with patience and good humor?
2. Do you take advantage of his questions and expressions of interest to guide him into further learning and explorations?
3. Do you help him develop physical and social skills as carefully as you encourage mental growth?
4. Do you help him learn how to get along with children of all levels of intelligence?
5. Do you avoid comparing him with his brothers and sisters or his companions?
6. Do you show him that he is loved for his own sake and not for his intellectual achievement?
7. Do you set reasonable standards of behavior for your child and then see that he meets them?
8. Do you provide early opportunities for decision making by your child, with follow-up of learning to evaluate decisions after carrying out whatever action was taken?
9. Do you try to find something specific to praise when he shows you his work? (A generalized compliment means little to gifted children.)
10. Do you help him find worthwhile and challenging reading materials and television programs?
11. Do you provide hobby materials and books?
12. Do you find places where he can study and work at his hobbies?
13. Do you provide a place to display his work?
14. Do you let him learn about and share in some of your hobbies and interests?
15. Do you take him on trips to points of interest?
16. Do you enable him to take advantage of lessons and activities offered by private groups or community organizations?
17. Do you teach him how to budget his time, organize his work,

and improve his study habits?

18. Do you help him make his own plans and decisions?
19. Do you give him increasing independence as his ability to handle responsibility increases?
20. Do you give him household responsibilities and other tasks suitable to his age level?
21. Do you avoid overstressing intellectual achievements?
22. Do you avoid pushing him by not being unreasonably demanding about after-school lessons or activities?
23. Do you resist the impulse to show him off?
24. Do you resist any temptation to exploit him?
25. Do you teach him to use his gifts for the benefit of society as well as for himself?
26. Do you encourage him to set high educational and vocational goals?
27. Do you refrain from trying to pick his vocation for him, but try to help him learn about as many occupations as possible?
28. Do your expressions of attitude and your behavior set the example you want him to follow?
29. Do you speak as properly as you want him to?

DOES YOUR SCHOOL PROVIDE FOR THE GIFTED?

1. Does your school test your child for:
   a. school readiness
   b. yearly achievement
   c. academic ability
   d. occupational preference
2. Does your school provide a profile of test results to you?
   Do you understand the profile?
3. Does your school identify the gifted child in kindergarten or pre-kindergarten?
4. Following identification, is a special program provided?
5. Is your special program part-time or full-time?
6. Do your special programs include:
   a. acceleration
   b. enrichment
   c. combination of both
7. Does your school provide a specialized staff to teach and evaluate the gifted program?
8. Is your gifted program approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education?
9. Does your school state clear goals for gifted education on the elementary and secondary levels?
10. Do these goals include a wide variety of experiences beyond basic curriculum?
11. Is experience given in the elementary level in such things as leadership, problem-solving, brain-storming, critical evaluation, social responsibility, curiosity-based research, investigation in a variety of areas, and exploration of ideals, models and values?
12. Is experience given on the secondary level in such areas as self-actualization, independent study, in-depth focus on several areas of adult endeavor, development of personal ideals, models and values?

13. Does your school provide such off-campus experiences as field trips or community-based projects?
14. Does the school invite community experts to take an active part in the enrichment program?
15. Does the community provide summer, week-end, after-school programs for the gifted?
16. Are parents themselves involved in the enriching experiences planned for children?
17. Are schools providing the stimulating and varied teaching materials essential to a challenging learning environment?
18. Does your school regularly evaluate its gifted program?
19. Do your schools invite colleges to help educate gifted children?
20. Does your school show approval of participation by the gifted in such special events as declamation contests, debating societies, extemporaneous speaking?
21. Does your school recognize that a gifted child can have the same emotional, social, and physical problems found in any child?
22. Does your school offer guidance at an early age for gifted children?
23. Does your school sponsor a Parents-of-Gifted-Children group which meets regularly?
24. Does your school provide you with literature on current writings about gifted children?
25. Does your school provide you with a description of the gifted program?